

Catholic Biblical Federation

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Bulletin

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English Edition

The Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) is an international fellowship of Catholic organizations involved in biblical-pastoral work. The members foster mutual service among all local churches.

Translation and distribution of Catholic and inter-confessional editions of the Bible in simple language, in cooperation with Bible Societies throughout the world, is part of this service.

Furthermore, it is the intention of the CBF to promote biblical studies, support the production of pedagogical aids for a better understanding of biblical texts, and assist in the formation of ministers of the Word (such as biblical animators, lectors and catechists), suggesting ways to form Bible groups and recommending the use of both mass and group media to facilitate their encounter with the Word.

The Federation also wishes to promote a dialogue with people who believe only in human values, as well as to encourage an encounter with the sacred writings of other religions. Through such encounters, the revealed Word of God can offer a more profound understanding of God and of human life.

The Federation appeals to everyone to add their personal and community support to these great tasks.

+ Alberto Ablondi, Bishop of Livorno
President of the CBF

" Easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for
all the Christian faithful"
(Dei Verbum, 22).

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The Theological Background to Inculturation - *LECTIO DIVINA*

by Michel de Verteuil, CSSp, Trinidad

The following article is a rendition of a talk delivered by Fr. de Verteuil, CSSp, Trinidad, at the Collegio del Verbo Divino in Rome on October 5, 1992. We are grateful to the Servizio di Documentazione e Studi (SEDOS) in Rome for the permission to reprint this article. The talk offers a model of practical biblical-pastoral ministry which may prove to be useful to the readers of the Bulletin. It also provides an interesting glimpse of the Caribbean other than that which is portrayed through tourism.

1. Method of Theology

I would like to begin with a few remarks on the importance of theology. So many people feel that it is simply abstract thinking by special individuals, with little relation to ordinary life. But it is interesting that the Reagan administration in the United States decided on a policy to 'denigrate liberation theology', because they realized what a powerful force theology really is. In South Africa, Albert Nolan was asked why he wasted time on theology instead of getting into the dangerous area of the fight against apartheid, but in fact he saw theology as quite dangerous, indeed radically subversive.

Theology and Culture

There can be no inculturation of the Church if it is not done in theology. The classical definition of theology, *fides quaerens intellectum*, faith seeking understanding, still stands. It is an attempt to express faith in our own language and culture (both personal and collective) in a systematic way.

It is only an attempt, so it is always provisional, never fully complete, always needing further development. It needs to be done in a systematic way, so that it will be consistent, coherent, capable of being explained and handed on to others, capable of making sense of the whole of life, capable of providing vision and meaning.

Faith is preached, but theology is needed to express it in language and culture, and as theology develops it produces doctrine, so that doctrine is the fruit of theology. Once doctrine is produced, the process begins again to keep the faith meaningful. When theology loses touch with the surrounding language and culture, it is no longer alive and faith suffers. This is a constant danger, so there is continual need to keep in touch with the reality of life and culture.

A New Theology

It can be said that we need a new theology in the Church today for a new age of mission. Recall Karl Rahner's description of the three eras of the Church: First, the Jewish Church as the followers of Jesus recognize themselves as a special group. Then the Greek Church, when non-Jewish converts joined and brought their own language, culture, and philosophy. This was a painful period of transition, with a great deal of dissension and bitterness and grew into the Greco-Roman era that lasted for centuries. Now we have the third era, a World Church, which includes all the cultures of the world. This is the Church of the future.

It is no longer possible to have one language, culture, philosophy, or theology dominant in the Church. We have a pluralist Church and pluralism in theology, with black theology, feminist theology, liberation theology, etc. It is obvious that we need a new method in theology or a convergence of theological methods, so that we can have a coherent theology that will be pluralist, appropriate to a pluralist Church.

Monastic and Scholastic Theology

Traditionally, there were two kinds of theology in the Church: monastic and scholastic. Not monastic in the modern sense (this would be an anachronism), but rather in the classical sense, perhaps better called community theology. These two differ with regard to setting and context. Monastic theology was done in the community; it was in touch with everyday life and had the monastery at its center. This went on for 800 years. Scholastic theology developed in special schools during the 11th and 12th centuries, it was done by specialists in the universities.

The context for monastic theology was the liturgy (feasts seasons, sacraments, Eucharist), whereas the setting for scholastic theology was the classroom. Monastic theology involved the whole community, whereas scholastic theology was for specialists, an elite.

Monastic theology was integrated into the culture, in song, dance, poetry, painting, and it recognized pre-Christian writers like Virgil, Catullus, Plato, Aristotle. Its matter was daily life. Scholastic theology created its own matter, its own culture and language, a kind of subculture apart from the surrounding culture.

Monastic theology stressed imagination, feeling, creativity, whereas scholastic theology emphasized reason and analysis.

A Dominant Theology

From the 11th century onwards monastic theology disappeared and scholastic theology took over the whole Church; this is still largely the case in the Church today. Nowadays theology requires money, time, special qualifications, so that 90% of the people are excluded from it. Systematized scholastic theology is controllable and controlling, and facilitates control of the Church.

We see the effects of all this in the history of the Church. It led to a compartmentalization of life, separating spiritual and secular life, prayer and action, and all the different spiritual exercises. Is it not strange that theologians are seldom canonized nowadays, whereas in monastic theology many were?

The message that seems to come across from scholastic theology is that it is not for life or for the soul; it is intellectual and abstract. In fact, some spiritual directors in seminaries warned students that it might make them proud, so they needed to pay special attention to their spiritual reading and other spiritual exercises to maintain a balance. A kind of cultural domination developed that was not to be found in the early Church.

The question of theological method, is crucial for the health of the Church. The *Lectio Divina* approach, I am recommending is not totally new, it is a of an old tradition, one that has born much fruit through the centuries.

2. The Method of *Lectio Divina*

I would like to explain the method of *Lectio Divina*, but also refer back to the history behind it. The first thing to remember is that *Lectio Divina* is both a method of prayer and of theology. This is important for several reasons:

Prayer and Theology

1) In the Church today *Lectio Divina* is often used purely as a method of prayer. In fact there is a very popular book called *Too Deep for Words*, which deals with *Lectio Divina* not only as a prayer method, but as a method of contemplative prayer. The two things are seen as separate, so that the word 'monastic' conjures up ideas of cloister, separation from the world, and *Lectio Divina* is related to that. But in fact *Lectio Divina* is at the same time a method of prayer and of theological reflection. In other words, it is of the very nature of *Lectio Divina* to break down compartmentalization. It is a very old method, but if it is limited to prayer alone it is not much help to us for the whole theological life of the Church.

2) It is a method of bible reading. The word *lectio* is very significant. It is reading. *Divina*, in ecclesiastical Latin does not mean 'divine'. For example, St. Thomas was called 'Divus Thomas'. It can be translated as 'sacred', but not 'divine'. A good translation, then, would be 'sacred reading'. But the point is that it is reading. A reading of what? It is simultaneously a reading of the Bible and a reading of experience; a way of reading which puts meaning into life. It means reading the Bible and reading life at the same time. It is reading as a sacred exercise.

3) It was organized in one way or other in the 4th and 5th centuries. In that period in the history of the Church, it was the dominant way of reading the Bible. The long tradition of interpreting texts in the Divine Office belongs to the tradition of *Lectio Divina*. It is a biblical method found in the Bible itself. It was the main form of doing theology in the Church and a science which was prevalent about the time of St. Benedict. His whole rule was based on this.

The Method

The method must be based on solid foundations, because what we need in the Church is a popular systematic approach to theology. We must not oppose systematic and popular. In the western world we take for granted that what is systematic is limited to people who have many years of formal education, and without this you cannot have systematized knowledge. That is false.

Some people say 'I like to work with simple people because they have such beautiful insights into the Bible'. There is no such thing as a simple person. We are all prejudiced and narrow and inclined to look after our own interests. Some people have formal education, and others have none, but nobody is simple. Everybody needs to have discipline in reading the Bible and in doing theology.

One of the reasons why popular theology must be systematized is to make sure that it is deep, good, and creative - not haphazard, certainly not sentimental, and above all not condescending.

Two Kinds Of Reading

We must distinguish between two kinds of reading: text book reading and story reading. We read text books for

information, for facts which are objective and static. We read stories to identify with the characters, and this involves feelings, heart, imagination; it is subjective and involves movement. It is generally believed that the purpose for reading stories, listening to them on radio or watching them on TV is entertainment, whereas we read text books in order to learn. But this is not the reality. In the Caribbean, people watch TV excitedly while sitting on the edge of their seats. It is a community activity accompanied by lots of talking and back-slapping. A family I visited told me they were excited because they would have two weddings on a weekend. When I told them how happy I was, it transpired that one of the weddings was in the TV program *Little House on the Prairie* and the other in *Dallas*!

Stories transmit memories, values, and culture. A popular TV program in the Caribbean is called *The Young and the Restless*. It is screened around midday and the whole country comes to a standstill to watch it. People identify with the stories, with the characters, and they unconsciously accept the values that are portrayed.

In text book reading the mind is active, the material is objective. In story reading feelings are involved, and the story has movement. Our culture teaches us that stories are for entertainment, for children, whereas text books are for grownups. This is totally untrue, because in every culture, including modern culture, stories are the vehicle through which the culture transmits its values.

Parents tell us about life when they were young, how hard it was, how poor or how well-off they were. There was no electricity or running water, and yet they had a very full life. This is not just to entertain us, but to show us that you can have a very full life without all these things. They tell us about how poor they had been not to entertain us, but to let us know they did not become wealthy by accident; they worked hard to get what they now have. Parents who are now poor might tell their children it was not always so, that once they were better off and fell on hard times, so they still have their self-respect. This is how a family hands on its values to children, helps them to have a sense of dignity and worth, helps them to keep true values. Similarly, when we join a religious congregation, we are told the story of the congregation in an interesting way, because we are entering a community with its own values and traditions. The way to understand these values is not through abstract teaching or text-books but through stories, memories, statues, paintings. All are reminders!

Every culture transmits its values through stories. But in our modern western culture, with its high premium on reason and intellect, we take for granted that stories are not serious. The terrible effect of this is that values are being transmitted without people being aware of it. People, thinking that they are merely being entertained, do not realize that values are being communicated to them. The general impression is that text-books are more serious, they are for adults. Stories are considered less serious, more for children, for primitive people (e.g. Genesis is only a story because the Jews were a primitive people). In fact all cultures depend on stories.

It needs to be made clear that a story teaches in a different way. Text books teach directly through facts (e.g. Washington is the capital of the United States), but a story teaches indirectly. TV viewers identify with the attractive characters

in a story and somehow adultery and other immoral acts seem less wrong when attractive people commit them. Values are thus being transmitted very subtly, unconsciously. Without thinking, - racism, violence, and adultery do not seem so bad. The story does not teach directly that these things are acceptable; it comes across indirectly. Very deep things can be communicated to us through stories.

Is the Bible Story-Reading?

What is the Bible? Many people would say a text-book, others, a mixture of story and text-book, but very few would answer spontaneously that it is a story book. The reason is first because of our long tradition of emphasizing reason, and also because we think stories are primitive, for children, and the Bible is not something childish. But in fact the Bible is a collection of stories, making up the one story of God's people. The individual books are stories. Jesus told stories. He himself is a story. The Bible contains proverbs and legislation, but these also have the quality of stories.

The Bible was written to communicate values; in it God wrote a story to communicate values. It is difficult to get this point across in the modern world. The world has been brain-washed by the belief that the rational is the highest way to wisdom and knowledge. But God understood human nature very well, and when he wanted to teach us values and the deep lessons of life, he told stories. The Bible is a story book made up of the Old Testament, the story of Jesus and the story of the early Church in the New Testament.

A Living Story

God sent us a living story: Jesus. We have to reeducate ourselves to the seriousness of stories. We have lost the art and skill of story-telling because we think of ourselves as serious, and story-telling is considered inferior, mere entertainment. It is sad that people who enter a seminary as accomplished story-tellers are brainwashed until they lose the art. We have to rediscover this art. *Lectio Divina* is based on this. It is story reading, the deepest way we can communicate with God or communicate the Word of God to others, because this is how the Bible was written in the first place. This is the first principle of *Lectio Divina*.

Two Kinds of Story Reading

The second principle is that there are two kinds of story reading: alienating or homecoming stories or reading.

Alienating

The fact is that 90% of today's stories are alienating. Alien means foreign, so an alienating reading makes you feel like a foreigner. You identify with the characters, but you cannot really identify; you feel alien, an outsider. It is not your world, but somebody else's, and you are not a part of it. The soap operas on TV are a clear example. People identify with the characters, but when the program is over they see the contrast with their own drab homes, their own families, friends, or cars. The world of the screen is much more exciting and attractive, but it is not their world. This is part of the attraction - escapism from a drab world without dignity, beauty, or romance.

Even people's personal dramas and infidelities are not as dramatic as those on the screen. The same is true of novels. People in the Caribbean walk the streets cut off from their surroundings as they listen on their walk-mans to Michael Jackson. Even in dances, they are not dancing with an actual partner, but with a dream person, the singer or

someone else. It is an escape from reality. Satellite TV enables populations of great poverty in the Caribbean to watch TV 24 hours a day; it keeps the children occupied and off the street. Apart from the story, advertisements portray foods and attractions that people have no experience of. These are really alien stories; it is an alienating reading.

Homecoming

A homecoming story is totally different. It is the story parents tell their children when they want to say: we are respectable people, what we have we had to work for, our house may not be as good as others, but listen to how we built it. Children thus acquire a sense of their own dignity. They understand why they have to work hard, and they realize what is worthwhile in life. Likewise the stories of the saints help us to understand ourselves, show us where we have come from, where we are going, what life is all about.

The Bible is A Homecoming Story

Take the primordial story of the passage through the Red Sea. It is very simply but dramatically told. The Israelites flee, terrified of the Egyptians, but also afraid of the sea ahead of them which is a place of monsters and danger. Moses put forth his wand, the water parted, and they walked through in safety, in fact more free than they were before. Have we ever had such an experience? Yes, all of us at times in our lives have experienced dangers behind and ahead of us, and somehow God brought us through, more free than we were before. But when you tell someone the story with all the drama of the Bible and ask if he or she has had similar experiences, they spontaneously say, "No, nothing so dramatic ever happened to me". But of course such things have happened to them; it is sad that they have to be shown this.

The trouble is that Hollywood shows the dramatic bible stories as mere stories happening in times past, out there, but not touching us today, personally. People think that the Exodus happened only to Moses, and to extraordinary people. So the Bible can be read as an alienating story, as something to which we are not connected. But it was not meant to be so. It is really a homecoming story. From bible reading, I learn my own story.

Telling an Old Story

Lectio Divina reveals dramatic stories, but they are not to be read as something of the past. They are to be read as stories that help us to understand where we are today and where we are going tomorrow. The difficulty is that we take it for granted that stories are not serious, that they are only entertainment, and also that nothing exciting can happen to us. We cannot imagine these stories happening in our own lives; they happen only in the past, to others. Much of our bible teaching gives the impression that the Bible is a book to be looked at, to be imitated because it has a message, but it is not something we live at the moment. *Lectio Divina* is based on the principle that the Bible is a story to explain to us not what should happen, nor merely what will happen, but what is actually happening, now - to each one of us. We need to discover this in every bible story and to celebrate it. All of this is brought out very well in a famous passage. *Isaiah 43:16-21* It makes clear that the method I am trying to explain is already implied in the Bible itself.

"Thus says the Lord, who made a way through the sea, a path in the great waters, who put out chariots and horse in the field and a powerful army, which lay down there

never to rise again, snuffed out, put out like a wick: No one need to recall the past, no need to think about what was done before. See, I am doing a new deed, even now it comes to light; can you not see it? Yes I am making a road in the wilderness, paths in the wild. The wild beasts will honor me, jackals and ostriches, because I am putting water in the wilderness (rivers in the wild), to my chosen people drink. The people I have formed for myself will sing my praises."

This was written when the Jews were in exile in Babylon. They had been a great people, but they became divided and were eventually overcome and led into slavery. It is not clear whether Isaiah was part of the community in exile or went there as a missionary, but this does not matter. He gave them a bible teaching. As exiles they were forced to do menial work; they were exploited and taken advantage of. Although a proud people, they were treated in a way which offended their dignity.

Isaiah teaches the Israelites in three progressive movements: First he tells them: "Thus says the Lord, who made a way through the sea, a path in the great waters, who put out chariots and horse in the field and a powerful army, which lay down there never to rise again, snuffed out, put out like a wick:..." It is the story of the Exodus, told very dramatically, without worrying about factual details, as a good story-teller does, to stir up their feelings. God himself put those Egyptians in the field and he snuffed them out. How did people respond to this story? Would they be encouraged, helped? Some would be cynical and ask: What does this story do for us today? Others would be escapist. What a beautiful story! Tell us more to help us forget our difficulties. But Isaiah anticipates both responses and says: "No one need to recall the past". No logic here! He has just recalled the past and then says there is no need to recall it. Why tell us the story if there is no need? The answer is: "See, I am doing a new deed..."

Retelling the Story

He has told the old story, not to make them cynical or encourage escapism, but so that they can recognize the same thing happening today; not what should happen, or what will happen if they start behaving themselves, but what is actually happening there and then. "...See, I am doing a new deed, even now it comes to light; can you not see it?..." This is the art of the *Lectio Divina*, to tell the old story, and then show that this old story is really a present modern story. And then Isaiah goes on to tell the old story again: "...Yes I am making a road in the wilderness, paths in the wild. The wild beasts will honor me, jackals and ostriches, because I am putting water in the wilderness (rivers in the wild), to my chosen people drink. The people I have formed for myself will sing my praises."

In this paradox we see the glory of good bible reading. You do not merely use the Bible as a starting point. The tendency is to say, Moses at the Red Sea has nothing to do with me, or to use it as an escapist, a reading in order to stay in the past. But it is to be seen as a story to throw light on the present, to help us understand what is happening to us now.

Understanding in a New Way

That is only the second movement. The third is to tell the old story again, to understand the present and the future so that the old text itself is seen in a whole new way. That is an example of the art of *Lectio Divina* in the time of Isaiah. It is

the same today. The Bible read correctly is not a book about the past, but about the present. We use biblical language to understand the present. We do not use the bible text and then go on to speak of the present in new theological language.

We speak of the present in biblical language, but conscious that we are speaking of the present and the future. This is the art of the theologian. The theologian is a bible story-teller, who reads the present in the light of the old bible story and then tells a new bible story. This requires knowledge of the Bible, but knowledge also of what is happening today. It is not primarily a question of moral exhortation. This needs to be stressed, because 90% of bible teaching has been reduced to moral exhortation and it is not that primarily, although there are moral conclusions to be drawn. *Lectio Divina* is a reading of the present in bible language. There are not two separate readings; it is all bible reading, both the past and the present are present.

3. The Three Stages

The method of *Lectio Divina* is a very simple process, done according to a discipline of three stages: **reading, meditation, prayer**. These three stages are the same for everybody. It is important to stress this. The method of *Lectio Divina* is itself a message of how we understand God and ourselves. The setting of *Lectio Divina* is part of the method. It is not meant to be done in a separate compartment of life, but in a life-setting of place and time. It is the same for all, whether university educated or illiterate. In the monastic tradition, only a few monks could read, but *Lectio Divina* was done by the whole community. Today it is done by many people who cannot read. I have found that everybody needs the same discipline. Anything less is to become condescending. The discipline is: **reading, meditation, prayer**.

Reading

Reading means familiarizing yourself with the text. Read it aloud, let the words sink in. The words themselves are important, though there is a tendency in our Church to think that they are not. Some criticize the fundamentalists, saying they stress the words whereas we stress the meaning. That is bad theology, bad spirituality, bad history. We love the words. *Lectio Divina* is based on a love of the actual text. Love the words, the sounds, the metaphors. Look up a commentary to get the meaning and to understand the context. Words are important.

Meditation

In *Lectio Divina* meditation means something different from what it means in other prayer contexts. In meditation the imagination is active when we enter into the story, when we recognize ourselves in it. For example, when we read the gospel about the useless servant, the first impression is of the seemingly inconsiderate, unjust master. But then an individual may see his or her mother in the figure of the servant. She works hard, then comes home and instead of serving herself she looks after the family, and only then feeds herself. That is meditation - to recognize the people of today in the story.

Prayer

Then comes prayer. Meditation leads us to thank God. What is essential to the method is that first we pray spontaneously in our own words, but with time prayer is

made in the very words of the Bible and these become our prayer. So instead of saying "O Lord, I thank you for my mother, that she looked after our family in a very thankless way", we use the words of Jesus. We thank God that our mother, when she came home, first served us and only afterwards looked after herself. At this point we start reading again, and then meditating again, then praying again - it's an ongoing activity. Prayer becomes a whole way of life, and the bible text a part of life. We understand ourselves and our life much better.

Time and Discipline

We began with the presupposition that the Bible is not a book for information, but a story communicating values. As a story it speaks to the imagination, and the purpose of the reading is to enter into that story, recognize it as our own and as the story of the whole of humanity. It is not an alienating experience, so we don't ask the question, will I be able to find myself in this story? We believe that God wrote this book for us so that we can meet him in it; that is our act of faith.

The Bible can always touch us very deeply, but we need to give it sufficient time. Too much of our reading is superficial. As bible and theology teachers we must help people to go deeply into a passage. A deep meditation cannot be done in just one session. I discovered this from experience. Now I take several sessions for the same text, with intervals of a week. The second week there is sharing in community, and in between people can share informally.

We should not look on the Bible as a book of messages to be transmitted. The passage has to stir memories, deep memories of people and things, memories forgotten, things for which we have not thanked God. With this experience we grow in self-confidence. So often people feel the Sunday gospel was written just for them; God wanted them to hear just that word. God is not teaching us with abstract, objective messages; he tells us stories and wants to hear ours; we discover each other in the combined stories.

Discipline is needed. Thousands of people receive real words from God, but the *Lectio Divina* gives us a method and discipline to enable this to happen. Read the text over and over again; something will always happen if we persevere. Listen to it, and do not read into it what is not there, or omit what you do not like. Do not try to guess what Jesus might have said or done; stay with the actual text.

There is also the discipline of meditation; be true to the text, true to experience. "See, I am doing a new deed". We need to be able to see that God is doing something new. The sign that we do this is that we pray, and that we pray in the words of the passage itself.

Discovering a Pattern

Meditation is ongoing. The three stages reading, meditation, and prayer are a cycle. Reading leads to meditation, and prayer leads us back to a new reading of the text. Our prayer is done in bible language and leads to a deeper meditation.

Life teaches us that when we look at our lives we discover certain patterns. An example would be that it is not enough to be healed. We must return and admit that we were healed, recognize what we were healed from, and admit that we were touched by Jesus or by some person. The

pattern is that we do not want to go back over humiliating experiences, and yet it is important that we do. So from one memory in our meditation we begin to make links with other events in our lives. Gradually we discover a pattern. The meditation goes deeper and deeper; this takes time. The text will bring up deeper memories, some may even make us cry. The passage will reveal something about my history, the kind of person I am. And then it will take another turn when I see the pattern repeated in another person's life, perhaps that of a parent or friend. Gradually I discover that this passage is telling me something about life, about service; it is a universal story.

Wisdom

Here we are in the area of wisdom. In *Lectio Divina* we do not start with general principles, but with simple text, leading to meditation, to memories and prayer and to insight! This is life. This is wisdom. It comes through imagination, not reason. It is what bible reading is meant to lead to. So often we do not allow this to happen in our bible groups. We do not take enough time, and perhaps also we do not fully believe that God's people are capable of deep theology and wisdom. We cannot teach wisdom, but we can teach the method that enables it to happen. We can help people to wait for the moment of wisdom or insight to occur - the fruit of *Lectio Divina*.

There are qualities peculiar to wisdom. It is not regimented, we cannot plan it or produce it; it just happens.

1) *It is a universal statement*, not a particular statement applicable to Catholics only, for example, we must go to Mass, but a universal statement; for example, true service does not look for reward, this is what true service is like. Such a statement applies to any minister of state or church. Or to be truly healed means that we acknowledge the fact and give thanks. Jesus told the man to stand up and go on his way. He did not want the man to remain there giving thanks. A true relationship is where we can do something for somebody and let them go on their way. Or - Dives and Lazarus. A life like Dives leads to burial, not to true life. This is wisdom.

2) The wisdom of *Lectio Divina* is an insight of the heart. It is not abstract, but concrete, leading to celebration.

3) It is an insight that is new, not radically new every week. It is a conversion experience.

4) It leads to action. It is a pity we have lost the stress on wisdom in our Church. St. Paul prayed continually for wisdom. Theology has become such an abstract science because it has lost its biblical roots. Wisdom leads to action, but is not identified with it. In our homilies it is not necessary to go on repeating - we must do this or that. Jesus simply told us what the kingdom is like. Let the stories work and speak for themselves.

Lectio Divina is very simple, very deep; it does not require great education; but it needs a method and discipline.

4. LECTIO DIVINA and Contemplative Prayer

Lectio Divina is a whole way of life, a way of understanding God, Church, ourselves, and our own spiritual growth. Theology had been one, a complete whole. Only later did it become divided up into compartments of dogma, moral, (cont. on pg. 13)

Follow-up to the Bogotá Assembly

Lay People and the Ministry of the Word

The Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council is sincerely interested in promoting lay theologizing. Lay people are to be given not only lectures and courses on theology but also the opportunity to engage in theologizing, to "make" theology. The Council says: "It is to be that many laypeople will receive an appropriate formation in the sacred sciences, and that some will develop and deepen these studies by their own labors" (GS 62). And again in the Declaration on Christian Education (GE 10), the Council calls for the provision of a course in theology "designed also for lay students". Does the present reality of the Church correspond to this recommendation? After having recalled in BDV 25 the right of lay people to cooperate with the hierarchy in the exercise of the ministry of the Word, which means to participate in some teaching functions of the Church, we now present a summary of an article by K.T. Sebastian, a theologian from India, about the novelty of this request of the Council for most of the Church, the resistance it still has to overcome, and in spite of this, the advances made. We offer thereafter a balanced summary of the responses the Federation received from some of its African members to the questionnaire sent by the General Secretariat.

I. Lay Theologizing

Cardinal Newman and the "Sensus Fidelium"

The American laity celebrated the opening of the Council by publishing again Cardinal Newman's "Essay on Consulting the faithful in matters of doctrine" which had originally appeared in "The Rambler", July 1859. When the article first appeared more than hundred years ago it stirred up a hornet's nest. Mgr. Talbot, one of Newman's persistent critics, asked Cardinal Manning rhetorically, "what is the function of the laity? Their function is to hunt, to shoot, to entertain. These matters they understand, but to meddle with ecclesiastical matters, they have no right at all." His reaction was typical of the clericalism, naked and unashamed which existed in the 19th century Church continued almost everywhere up until the time of the Council, and still exists even today. The Indian hierarchy and the clerics were not at all different from their European counterparts in their domination over the laity.

If consulting the laity on matters of doctrine was a scandal for the Church dignitaries, theologizing by the laity would be preposterous because theology was, until recently, exclusively a clerical affair. It was supposed to grow and flourish only within the walls of a seminary or an institute of theology.

But Vatican II proved Cardinal Newman right. The Constitution on the Church teaches clearly that they (the lay people) are made one body with Christ and are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ (LG 31). Again, Christ fulfills his prophetic role not only through the hierarchy but also through the laity (LG 35). But the vindication of Cardinal Newman comes under the section on the "People of God" (LG 12), a passage that would have given a real shock to Newman's adversaries. It goes to the extent of attributing *infallibility* to the *sensus fidelium* - the sense of the faithful. The passage says, "The body of the faithful as a whole, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief. Thanks to a supernatural sense of the faith which characterizes the people as a whole, it manifests this unerring quality when, 'from the bishops down to the last member of the laity,' it shows universal agreement in matters of faith and morals". *Sensus fidelium* was a favorite idea of Cardinal Newman. Incidentally it also points out the limits of papal infallibility. The pope can define only the faith of the Church, rather than the consensus of the faithful. He cannot teach anything that is not rooted in tradition and in the authentic faith of the people of God.

Theologizing in the Early Church

The early Church has its theology in the Gospels, but this theology is not one of specialists. The people who received the Good News of Jesus were mostly the poor and the marginalized with whom Jesus almost identified himself. The written form of the Gospels is in a way the people's experience of the Christ-event. "It is people's theology". The theology of the early Church was neither clerical nor lay for the early Church had no such distinction; it was one people of God. The one people of God came to be divided into people and priests only later on.

We learn from the New Testament, especially from the Epistles of Paul, that the Christian message spread far and wide from the very beginning because it was proclaimed by all -each according to his/her special gifts and opportunities in life. Paul's letters are full of admiration for the men and women who assisted him in his missionary efforts (Col 1:7; 4:12; Rm 16:4,6; 1 Co 16:15;

Ph 4:3). These men and women, it is quite clear, were assisting Paul by communicating the message according to the needs and the specific situations of the people whom they were contacting. Were they not theologizing, i.e. communicating the Word in their own way?

The First Theologians in the Church

On the authority of great scholars like Fr. Yves Congar, OP and Hans Kueng, we can say that the first theologians in the Church were lay men: Justin, Tertullian, Pantaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen (who later was ordained a priest). A number of the Fathers of the Church began their theological work while they were lay men, for example, Sts Cyprian, Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, Jerome, and Augustine. "The distinction between a religious culture reserved to the clergy alone and a profane culture allowable to the laity is quite a modern idea ... foreign to the patristic age. There was only one culture, which used the techniques evolved by the pagans as a basis and directed them to the service of God. Cultured lay people took an active interest in religious matters, and they figured considerably among the correspondents who put theological questions to an Augustine or Jerome." (Congar)

But when the Church suffered under clerical domination, theology underwent the same fate. In the east, however, theology and culture at large were less a clergy monopoly. The lay people in the east were more educated than in the west. The tradition of lay theologians has remained alive in the Orthodox east, and they held important chairs in the theological faculties of Athens and elsewhere.

Even though there were stray cases of lay theologians from the Middle Ages up until the 19th century, their numbers were quite insignificant. Theology continued to be a clerical preserve for such a long time that lay contributions in this regard became unthinkable for Church dignitaries in the western Church. That is why they failed to understand or appreciate the position of Cardinal Newman.

But the situation changed with the restoration of Christian philosophy by Leo XIII, the renewal of Catholicism, and a more scientific approach to religious disciplines. More lay people came forward to deal with religious questions and also with theology. Though they did not make any claim to be theologians, their contribution to the religious sciences was quite significant. It was mainly one of defending or explaining the faith. Prominent among them were G.K.Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, Jacques Maritain, Etienne Gilson, and Christopher Dawson who lived and died before the Council. F.J.Sheed of Sheed Ward and Miss Marie Goldie, a professor of pastoral theology in Rome, have made significant contribution to the theology of the laity during and after the Council.

The teachings of Vatican II, especially the new ecclesiology and the People of God concept of the

Church, have awakened the laity to their dignity and legitimate role in the mission of the Church. It went from "Catholic Action" of the pre-Vatican time which limited the role of the laity to one of assistance in the mission of the hierarchy to "Lay Apostolate" in *Lumen Gentium* (LG 33) which allowed "participation of the lay people in the saving mission of the Church" and was a big step forward. The prophetic role of the laity which includes the right to study and teach theology is part of the lay people's rights which at times becomes an obligation (LG 37). This right to study theology and teach - which of course includes the right to theologize - has been incorporated in the revised Canon Law of the Latin Church (n° 217, 218, 229) and the New Canon Law for the Oriental Churches (n° 404:1,2,3).

Another development of a permanent nature which has promoted the theology of the laity and by the laity was the establishment of the Pontifical Council for the Laity by Paul VI in 1977.

The Synod on the Laity

Perhaps the greatest occasion for theologizing on the laity and by the laity was the 1987 Synod on the Laity. During the three or four years preceding the Synod there was a great deal of study and discussion on the role and mission of the laity in the Church and the world. The *Lineamenta* which was published as a study aid before the Synod and the papal exhortation *Christifideles laici* which came out in 1989 are very good resource materials for a deeper theological reflection on the laity.

But the composition as well as the dynamics of the Synod were not at all suited to the theme of the laity. Even 20 years after the Council which had acknowledged the prophetic role of the laity, the Church was holding a Synod of Bishops to study the role of the laity! One wonders how long the Church will continue to be equated with the bishops! Is it too much if we expect a Synod of the Church, something like a universal pastoral council, to discuss a theme that affects the whole Church?

Present Realities of Theologizing in the Church

In spite of the *aggiornamento*, the spirit of on-going renewal and the resolution to respond to the signs of the time, the Church continues to be clerically dominated. Theology is still a clerical preserve, and very often it is identified with seminary training. Theological education in some countries is seen even today only as a requirement for priesthood. If there is any theologizing at all, it is from the clerical perspective. The lay people are lagging very much behind the priests in the field of theology.

This situation is different from continent to continent. In the western world, especially in the European countries like Germany, the faculty of divinity is a department of university education and even state universities offer

courses in theology. Every Catholic university worth the name has a good department of theology; therefore, any lay person who has a desire for theological education and a charism for theologizing can take any number of courses in theology, earn degrees in the subject, and get employed also on the strength of theological merits.

But in most countries of the so-called "Third World" any lay person who wants to study theology has to get the necessary sponsorship from his bishop, knock at the door of a seminary, and go with the seminarians for his studies 'as a very rare species'. By the time the course is over, the lay person has lost his/her lay individuality, freedom, creativity, etc. The product is likely to be a semi-clerical, theologically half-baked lay person. There are at present no alternatives for a lay person to study theology. But even if they do, lay theologians, if they are not attached to a seminary, are placed in an embarrassing situation. There is no library where they can get the necessary books, and they cannot afford to purchase the books because of the high prices. The lack of secretarial assistance for the composition of books and the difficulty in getting publishers for their works are some of the other disadvantages of a lay theologian. Another very important factor that stands in the way of a lay person's commitment to theology is that he or she cannot earn a living working in theology. This has been one of the main reasons why projects to promote theological institutes for the laity have had to be abandoned. Experience tells that in the so-called "Third World" countries, theology will continue to be the reserve of the clergy for many more years; however, in spite of this general situation, there are hopeful signs. Some dioceses and universities are now starting theological institutes or courses for the lay people who, if they have other possibilities to earn their living, are interested in receiving a theological education.

New Horizons

Our bishops are now becoming aware of the fact that without a committed laity, the Church will not be able to fulfill her mission effectively. If the Church is in the world and for the world, the role of the laity in the secular areas of life becomes crucial. Today evangelization means, more than anything else, the transformation of society according to the values of the Reign of God. In countries where the rebuilding of the temporal order has assumed top priority, lay people have to become witnesses of the Reign of God in areas such as politics, government, education, mass media, trade union, culture, etc. It is through their presence in these areas, the Church has to become a corrective force, a leaven or catalyst in society. But this will not happen as long as the lay people are kept merely at the margin of the Church. Their right to play their own distinctive role in the Church, in areas like thinking, planning, decision-making, financing, and liturgy must be recognized. But this would mean updating the theological formation of the laity and giving them the chance to become theologically active. Situations of exploitation, caste rivalry, communalism, violence, cor-

ruption, etc, are excellent subjects for theological reflection. Again it is within their competence to reflect meaningfully on problems of development, environment, social justice, rights of women and children, and the underprivileged in the country, but hardly any lay theologizing has been done until now. The reason is that they do not get opportunities to think beyond the elementary catechism of their school days. It is therefore praiseworthy that some religious congregations have already come forward to help the laity in this respect, and taken as their motto the words of John the Baptist: "He must grow bigger, I must grow smaller" (John 3:30).

Prof. K.T. Sebastian, Bangalore, India
A summary of: Word and Worship, 6/1992

II. Summary of Responses to the Questionnaire

From the 31 questionnaires that were sent, the General Secretariat received 10 responses, one from each of the following:

- National Biblical Associations in Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, and Zimbabwe
- Diocesan or interdiocesan centers in Kusami, Ghana; Bandundu, Zaire; and Kikwit, Zaire
- Religious Congregations of Benedictines of Peramiho, Tanzania; Divine Word Missionaries, Bandundu, Zaire; and Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa, Lusaka, Zambia.

The questionnaire's primary focus was the attention the biblical apostolate is giving to the lay people in Africa. The responses show what had already been observed in the reports prepared for the Plenary Assembly of the Federation in Bogotá and which had already been summarized in the book, *The Bible and the New Evangelization* (Stuttgart 1992): namely that the responsible leaders in the biblical apostolate are making big efforts and in some places they have even obtained remarkable results; however, the general situation in Africa has negative repercussions on the biblical apostolate in general. Some complain that the traditional catechesis has not placed enough importance on Holy Scripture; therefore, it is only proper to first of all point out such difficulties:

Difficulties

1. from the laity themselves (group members, animators, volunteer collaborators):

The Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa in this context inquired about the experience of other Federation members with regard to working in the biblical pastoral ministry among people who are malnourished, overwhelmed with work in order to survive, absent from their homes most of the time, and in the midst of a society that sinks deeper into mourning day by day. How can one bring the Word of God to these people? Almost all the responses point out that the general poverty is the

major difficulty, together with the large distances and insufficient means of communication all of which make it impossible for the people to receive the necessary formation and the opportunity to engage in pastoral work. Furthermore, not only does the general illiteracy make dealing with the Bible very difficult (Zaire), but also the high price of Bible editions is a hindrance to the biblical pastoral ministry. In summary, it is a "discouraging" situation (Tanzania). As a consequence to the traditional catechesis not placing enough importance on the Bible, an inferiority complex sets in among the Catholic lay people when dealing with Protestant Christians who know the Bible better and explain their faith using biblical references. This is especially true in respect to the "sects" that "sow confusion everywhere" (Zaire).

2. from the hierarchy (bishops, priests, religious):

As we have seen in the past, the diverse attitude of the hierarchy in respect to the biblical pastoral ministry is not only present in Africa, but also on other continents. From Africa, some of the responses expressed appreciation towards the diocesan bishops for their interest, encouragement, and financial support of pastoral projects; however, the responses also point out that the biblical pastoral ministry is not a priority. In documents like the Diocesan Synod of Kinshasa (Zaire), 1986-88, the urgency of the biblical pastoral ministry is acknowledged and guidelines and recommendations have been established, but in practice, little happens. A diocesan priest with personal interest in the biblical pastoral ministry is difficult to find. On the other hand the lay people are considered incompetent by the hierarchy to use the Bible correctly. This closed mentality of the clergy is after all the fruit of their own formation in the seminaries: the lack of interest in the biblical pastoral ministry which leads to insecurity and uneasiness. Consequently, documents like the Final Statement of the Federation from Bogotá are neither distributed nor implemented. At this time, the hierarchy seemingly concentrates its efforts on the preparation for the African Synod.

Aside from the responses, the attitude of the African hierarchy also becomes evident during the annual "Meeting of the African Collaboration" (MAC), a division of the Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM). The last MAC meeting, held in March 1992 to which religious institutes and missionaries sent their delegates who are working in Africa, focused on the new Christian movements in the region. MAC recognized that the pastoral leaders of the new Christian movements base all their religious instruction on biblical texts which is in contradistinction to the Catholics who still do not consider the Bible to be a part of their spirituality. Furthermore, even priests who have a modern exegetical formation are not concerned about communicating their knowledge at a popular level. In sermons and in books on spirituality, Catholics do not make sufficient use of the Bible, even though what they say or write could be more biblically founded than what pastoral leaders of the new Christian movements say or write. In conclusion, among Catholics, other sources of authority

are more important than the Bible. The responses also reveal that if the Church does not give more importance to the Bible, the impression that the Catholics do not take the Bible seriously continues to grow; therefore, MAC recommends that more biblical courses be organized and offered at different levels to explain the importance of the Bible to the faithful and provide access to the Word of God. Especially more elementary literature should be published and distributed and biblical displays should be constructed to reach at least the literate lay people. MAC also suggests that New Testaments should be donated to the young people on the occasion of their confirmation rather than rosaries. Nonetheless, after examining the declarations of MAC, one can conclude that what remains to be urgent in Africa is for the clergy to receive full comprehensive biblical training (Botswana).

Activities and Reasons for Optimism

Even though Africa faces many difficulties, there are reasons to be optimistic. In general, the simple people in Africa hold a great interest in learning how to know and use the Bible. For example, in Zaire there are people who walk for 160 kilometers to take part in a basic bible course (Bandundu); small Christian communities work intensively to use the Bible as a basis through which the pastoral biblical ministry reaches all social classes, ages, and professions; bible reading in the family is becoming more widespread, in fact, in some countries like Zaire, the Bible is a bestseller. Bible reading requires from the Church orientation in the use of the Bible in order to at least avoid frequent misuse in a magical or superstitious way.

With the Biblical Center in Africa and Madagascar (BICAM) in Nairobi, Kenya the prerequisite has been established to organize and coordinate the biblical pastoral ministry on the continental level. The Center, a section of SECAM, is under the direction of Abbé Laurent Naré. Simultaneously, several other centers for biblical pastoral formation perform valuable programs in Botswana, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Zaire, and Zimbabwe. All of them agree not only in the aim to make the Bible accessible for all the faithful but also to reach lay people like scholars, teachers, leaders of small Christian communities, youth, and families. As a result, bible courses, weeks, weekends, and retreats are being offered more frequently, along with a larger variety of biblical publications. Cardinal Etsou of Kinshasa, Zaire counts especially on the work and determination of the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD). The Missiological Institute Lumko in South Africa has produced copious materials for a variety of programs and courses which are willingly and -if we may say so- successfully adopted in many countries of Africa (and incidentally, also in other countries outside of Africa). They provide not only a more solid religious formation but also form a useful counterbalance to the non-Catholic sectarian movements that the Catholics in Africa have to face rather helplessly.

(cont. from pg. 8)

ascetical, spiritual theology, etc. It was one, meditating on the Word of God. It was also integrated in the sense of being merged into the culture. Pre-Christian artists and philosophers were naturally integrated into the thinking and culture of the Church. This is seen, for example, in the celebration of Christmas, 2nd of February, and folk festivals in different parts of Europe. Integration took place because the Church lived by the *Lectio Divina*.

Along with the three stages of reading, meditation, and prayer... some writers on *Lectio Divina* introduce a fourth stage, contemplation. But my reading on the matter leads me to think that this is not a distinct concept. All prayer is contemplative, and it is not right to distinguish two kinds of prayer, non-contemplative and contemplative. This is to misrepresent our tradition of prayer in the Catholic Church.

'Differentiated' Prayer

The prayer stage of *Lectio Divina* contains two steps: the first could be called differentiated prayer. As we find in meditation, as soon as the scripture text brings a memory (for example, of our mother, or ourselves in a certain situation or experience) we begin to meditate on it and find that the meditation leads to three different kinds of prayer: thanksgiving, humility, and petition.

First, in thanksgiving, praise, or celebration we read our story; 'Lord, I thank you for Jesus, the way he healed those lepers. .. I thank you for the healing experiences in my life.'

Secondly, we feel humble 'Lord, I realize how I have never gone back on my healing to acknowledge it, so I have not really had a deep healing.'

Finally there is petition. 'Lord I think of all the lepers in our society, send them Jesus or someone who will walk out on the waters to help them.'

These are three different kinds of prayer. Of these three, the two most neglected are the first two - praise and humility. We are too used to prayer as petition. The real sign that we are doing *Lectio Divina* is that we come to praise and celebrate that Jesus is alive, in our own life and in the lives of others. Until we do, we have not finished our meditation ! It takes time, honesty, and depth to discover God at work in our lives. Likewise we need humility to be able to discover the sinfulness in life. This is the first stage in the prayer moment.

Simplified Prayer

If we stay with the passage in our meditation long enough, for a week or more, we will find that something is happening in prayer. It becomes simple. We can if we wish, call this simple prayer contemplative. All real prayer is contemplative.

The simplifying process works in two directions. First we find that we are concentrating on fewer and fewer words in the passage. 'Lord, I am a useless servant, I will tidy myself and serve you, and then I will eat afterwards.' or 'Stand up and go on your way.' 'When I went to show myself, I found I was cured.' We find that we are happy to use the simple phrase.

The second step towards simplicity is that we no longer differentiate between praise, humility, and petition. So we are merely saying a phrase, of praise, humility, and petition altogether at the same time. In the tradition of the *Lectio Divina* there is no different method for contemplative prayer and the rest of prayer, or for the rest of our theological life. The result of wisdom and meditation is that we merely rest in the passage and are content just to say the words.

Prayer of the Heart

Then we come to a third stage, when we say the words not with our lips but with our heart. So we are saying them, and yet not saying them; our lips are no longer moving. That is an advanced stage of contemplative prayer. In the tradition of *Lectio Divina* this is built in. It is not something meant only for chosen souls or for a spiritual elite. It is for everybody. Everybody is called to find union with God in the Bible. It is just there and is ongoing. An ordinary housewife goes about her work singing one line of a psalm without analyzing the words, the bible text holds her full attention, and holds her in peace, in oneness with others, in oneness with the whole of creation, and with her work. Such a person might wonder if you asked her whether what she was doing was sacred? Of course! The method of *Lectio Divina* is so normal, so ordinary!

Holiness for All

Those of us who study should help people to come to this experience of prayer, of resting in God as a normal part of life. There is no need for a cloister or a special setting for this. I had a sad experience in Trinidad of a famous spiritual writer telling a group that in order to live a contemplative life they needed to set apart a special room for quiet in the house, - with a carpet! But few of his listeners had any spare room or any experience of carpets. To speak like that is to write off 90% of our population as incapable of contemplative prayer. What about the mother with 6 or 7 children in two rooms? Or the wife who meditates while lying beside a drunken husband seven nights a week? These people experience contemplative prayer, but we have allowed our theology to give the impression that it is not possible for them. We separate prayer from the experience of people, from everyday life. This is not our Catholic tradition. All are called to holiness, to make progress, to grow in it. Our experience of oneness with God is rooted once more in practical everyday experience. We do not have to withdraw from it in order to have contemplative moments and contemplative prayer.

I recall the testimony of a woman surrounded by her children who told how she saw Jesus present in them, thanked God for them, and just rested in the experience. Or the experience of sin, suddenly we understand what a sinner we are and how we have been healed. We just remain humble in the presence of God. This leads to silence, to resting in God. *Lectio Divina* gives unity to everything in life, and it is based on a very simple but basic truth - that God is in fact at work in our lives. It is very different if bible reading is done in a moralizing way. Then we discover that we are not like Jesus; we are told that we should be doing this or that; we pray to become more like Jesus; our prayer is active. But if in meditation we recognize the tiny thread of Jesus in our life, we rest in that, realizing that the life of Jesus in us is the deepest thing about us. The important thing is not to pray for something to happen, but just to relax in the fact that it is happening. "...See, I am doing a new deed, ...can you not see it?..."

Integration of Prayer and Life

One of the great blessings of *Lectio Divina* is that it enables us to bring back to our Church that integrated prayer life, where liturgy, personal prayer, bible reading and studying, and contemplative prayer all end up as one exercise. This is to be celebrated, not in a sentimental way seeing everything as beautiful, and the world as a wonderful place. The world is quite cruel and unjust, and sin is very

powerful. But grace is never quenched, and we celebrate that. *Lectio Divina* helps people to pray with a system built into the rhythm of daily life and the life of our Church. There can be a kind of consumerism in prayer nowadays, where people shop around to find what pleases them in the various methods, flitting from one to another. This may be a sign of yearning, but it can also be a sign of escapism, of wanting to avoid the challenge of prayer itself.

The discipline of *Lectio Divina* is to stay with the bible story and go more deeply into it. The method is deep but simple, not expensive. In poor groups where electricity fails, people manage with their candles and their Bible; nothing more is needed for a wonderful evening of prayer, no video or other audio-visual aids. The poor are not made to feel second-class. The setting can be very simple, with husbands waiting outside, children playing around the place. God is there in all of it! That is what *Lectio Divina* is all about. There is nothing higher than that in the prayer life of the Church; contemplative prayer is not another step above it. *Lectio Divina* breaks down the compartmentalization of life and prayer and makes it abundantly clear that contemplation is within the reach of all and not reserved for a special elite.

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

Is Lectio Divina individual or communal? In fact it is both. *Lectio Divina* is a very deep experience of God, of the sacredness of our lives, a deep method of discerning our sinfulness, of taking stock of our life of grace. Now, that cannot be done in community alone. There must be an interplay between the community and our personal life of prayer. I work with a group which meets once a week. I familiarize them with the text, and they take it for the week to their prayer, and the following week we share our experience of the text. At first I used to do it all in one session, but then I discovered that it was necessary to leave time for personal prayer on the text. There must be complementarity between personal prayer and sharing. But the sharing is necessary; it is not private revelation. In community sharing, everyone is a deep person, a precious person; it is not a regimented community. Unfortunately in some parts of the Church, bible sharing is very regimented which is harmful to community. People's concerns are different, and so they read the story differently. Allow the community to discover what the word of God is for them.

Why do we repeat the text in Lectio Divina? As opposed to the fundamentalist reading of the Bible, we should love the actual words. Suppose the celebrant at Christmas midnight Mass said we are so familiar with the Nativity gospel that I won't bother reading it; let's go straight to the homily! We need to hear the text over and over again, because we love it. I actually heard a celebrant tell people he would not delay them with a full reading of Mt 25, so he just referred to the phrase "...in so far as you did this to one... you did it to me," and proceeded with his homily, but the homily was not short! This is all wrong. The Bible is not only a message, but a message in a story, and we should not take short cuts. For the fundamentalists, the passage has one meaning only, but for us the passage has many meanings, and we read it over and over again and constantly discover new meanings.

How do you choose what passages to start from? A good place to start is with the Sunday gospel, which ought to be the core of the *Lectio Divina*. This enables us to integrate biblical and theological reflection with prayer life. There is too much fragmentation in our life. We may not like the text

at first, but we must not manipulate it, picking and choosing. I work with a group of priests. We have been meeting once a week for 14 years. When we started we thought of the 3-year cycle, but we kept starting again. It has so many spin-off effects, but the main one is to keep the prayer setting for theological reflection.

What do you do when there are special events in the life of the parish, - death, marriage, etc. which call for a special word? *Lectio Divina* is not regimented. Reading, meditation, prayer are all essential, but we can start with the event and meditate on it and then go on to prayer and the bible text. But it is not good to manipulate the text. Do not take the phrase Jesus said "Do not be afraid," and apply this universally. The context is of Jesus walking on the waters and the disciples thought he was a ghost; we have to fit into that story, not just use the phrase cut off from its context. The advantage of the lectionary is that the Church has chosen the text. It is interesting that the same text can speak to all sorts of events and situations. It is not good to have a series of separate texts for sickness, depression, various moods, and occasions.

Can you identify someone who has used Lectio Divina extensively? The *Lectio Divina* is a place where people can express their theology or where somebody can express it on their behalf, so that there is a sense of theology, of the Church reflecting on what it means to be a follower of Jesus today. It is not enough to do theology, we must articulate it in some kind of systematic way, and that is why skill is required. It is not a question of teaching people theology; it is the theology of the people themselves that you interpret and write down. That is a delicate balance because one is inclined to take over and put in one's own views. To work out the *Lectio Divina* requires discipline, patience, humility. It is a great need of the Church today. One of the great proponents of the *Lectio Divina* is Carlos Mesters, a Dutch Carmelite who has been working in poor and often illiterate communities in Brazil for many years. He stresses the need to systematize the theology of the people, and most professional theologians are not skilled in this. A recent number of the *Bulletin Dei Verbum* has a good article of Mesters entitled *Faithful Reading of the Bible* (BDV 13, 471989). He is an excellent example of a theologian articulating the theology of the people.

Can Lectio Divina be done in illiterate communities? With regard to illiterate communities, I do not have direct experience of these, because we have no illiteracy problem in the Caribbean. But I know it is not an obstacle. Recall the three stages reading, meditation, prayer. Someone reads the passage for those who cannot read; there is no problem. Some get to know it by heart. I have people with sight problems, but I suggest that they get their children to help them, and it works. But I am strict with them, and point out that their difficulty does not mean they can be careless about what is in the passage. In this way they feel they are not being treated as second-class; they are full members of the community and must share in the discipline.

The setting is that of real life. One woman said she did her meditation lying beside her husband who was drunk every night of the week; but this did not take from her meditation. Some novice-masters would be shocked at such idea, but it was no problem for her. What counts is the humility and imagination, to discover the presence of God.

Bible Week in Zimbabwe

At the Plenary Assembly of Bogotá, the celebration of Bible days, weeks, and/or months was urgently recommended. This recommendation seems to have fallen on fertile ground, for complying initiatives have been reported from various parts of the world. *BULLETIN DEI VERBUM* reports on a regular basis the development in this area, for what one ministry may be doing may stimulate other ministries with new ideas and later become practical in their work. In the following, you will find a detailed summary of a Bible week organized by the Bible Center in Harare, capital of Zimbabwe. The course is designed to help the participants prepare for and follow the course easily. A copy of the original (English) is available upon request from the secretariat.

1. Bible Weeks are a world wide movement in the Catholic Church: not only weeks, but days, months, and even years are being set aside for this experience. Parishes, deaneries, dioceses, and countries are caught up.
2. The inspiration for them comes from Vatican II, particularly from chapter 6 of *Dei Verbum*, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, and more immediately from the encouragement of the Catholic Biblical Federation, the umbrella organization for the organization of the biblical apostolate worldwide. Even more immediately, the growth of fundamentalistic so-called biblical churches has provided a stimulus for us to tackle the widespread Catholic ignorance about the Bible. (Distinguish these sects from the mainline Protestant churches, to which Catholics owe much for their understanding of the Bible). Pope John Paul II, in his letter to the Catholic Biblical Federation Plenary Assembly, Bogota, July 1990, recommended the celebration of Bible week or month.
3. Each section of these notes corresponds to one session of one hour, which includes some talk, some personal or group work, and some possible questions. Personal follow-up is strongly recommended: reread the handouts and read the indicated passages at home. Try to do the simple task of preparation indicated.
4. The aim is to serve the parish and meet its needs. Many have an inferiority complex about Bible. Catholics are attacked because they are ignorant about it and are accused of being unfaithful to it. Some have fallen into the temptation to move away from Catholic Church because values presented outside it seem to be more attractive. Others are simply looking for information to gain a better understanding of their faith. Others may want to be able to enter more confidently into ecumenical discussion.
5. The topics tackled came from the cathedral parish council. Hopefully questions will arise which may be submitted and discussed during another occasion. For most of us, a Bible Week is something new. We help each other to make it worthwhile and a success under the Spirit of God. The model is the risen Christ explaining the Scriptures on the Emmaus road (cf. Lk 24), or Philip explaining them to the Ethiopian on the road to Gaza. (cf. Ac 8).
6. The area is wide and complex; we cannot deal with everything, but we aim to make a beginning in our quest to value more the Word of God and in this way to raise the quality of our Christian lives.

An Information Sheet

(for distribution beforehand)

"Behold I Make All Things New" (Isaiah 43:19; Rev 21:5)

1. Why a Bible Week?

- * To learn what the Bible is and what it is for.
- * To understand it not as an ancient book but as a living and timeless library to build up the individual and the community.
- * To become personally engaged with it, to make the reading of it a pleasure and a profit.
- * To make ourselves at home with it and have the best Catholic thought about it.

2. Which Bible?

Contents:

A Catholic Bible consists of 72 books including the so-called Deutero-Canonical (or "Apocryphal") books.

Translations:

A good translation balances intelligibility and accuracy. In English, the Revised Standard Version (RSV) stresses accuracy; the Good News Version, or "Today's English Version" (TEV), aims at intelligibility. Emphasis on intelligibility puts accuracy at risk and vice versa. Avoid "The Living Bible": this admits to being no more than a paraphrase. The fullest Catholic Bible is the New Jerusalem Bible: it is well laid out for legibility, its translation is intelligible, and the standard edition has copious notes. As an example, read the opening sentence of Romans in RSV, then read it in TEV.

The Teaching of the Church:

The Dogmatic Constitution of Divine Revelation of Vatican II (*Dei Verbum*):

"...all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and ruled by sacred Scripture. For in the sacred books the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the force and power in the Word of God is so great that it remains the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the souls, the pure and perennial source of spiritual life...." (DV 21).

"Therefore, all the clergy must hold fast to the sacred Scriptures through diligent sacred reading and careful study, especially the priest of Christ and others, such as deacons and catechists, who are legitimately active in the ministry of the Word. This cultivation of Scripture is required lest any of them become 'an empty preacher of the Word of God outwardly, who is not a listener to it inwardly' since they must share the abundant wealth of the divine Word with the faithful committed to them, especially in the sacred liturgy. This sacred Synod earnestly and specifically urges all the Christian faithful too, especially religious, to learn by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures the 'excelling knowledge of Jesus Christ' (Ph 3:8). 'For ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.' (Jerome) Therefore, they

should gladly put themselves in touch with the sacred text itself, whether it be through the liturgy, rich in the divine Word, or through devotional reading, or through instructions suitable for the purpose and other aids which, in time, are commendably available everywhere, thanks to the approval and active support of the shepherds of the Church. And let them remember that prayer should accompany the reading of sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together; for 'we speak to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read the divine sayings'... (DV 25).

"He is present in his Word since it is He Himself who speaks when sacred Scriptures are read in the Church" (Liturgy Decree 7).

Session I

The Approach of the Fundamentalist

1. Fundamentalism

This reflects a concern to keep the 'fundamentals' of the faith. It is a phenomenon found in Islam (Iran, Algeria), in Catholicism (Lefebvre), in Protestantism (especially since the scientific progress of the 19th century), and in many recent Christian sects from North America.

2. Some features of Scriptural Fundamentalism

a. The Bible is treated as a single book of equal authority throughout: "The Bible says..." There is no growth of revelation or morality in the Bible.

- * God speaks directly in the Bible. The human writer simply receives dictation.
- * Everything in the Bible is true, and truth means historical truth. There is a dichotomy between real life and the biblical world
- * Because the Bible is the Word of God, attempts to apply human methods of study to it amount to blasphemy. There is no real possibility of dialogue with other approaches.
- * The prophets foretold the future, even our own times.
- * The emphasis is on individual salvation: "church" is ignored.

b. Particular doctrines, particularly of the new sects include:

- * The closeness of the end of the world.
- * Anti-communist, anti-Islam, pro-Israel attitudes.
- * Health and wealth are the right of every believer.
- * Social evils are the fault of the devil.
- * Human authority, however corrupt, must be accepted.

c. This world in itself is of no interest. Involvement in social progress and development is irrelevant. We can do nothing.

3. The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church on the Bible.

- *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, Pius XII, 1943
- *Verbum Dei, Constitution on Divine Revelation of Vatican II*, 1965

* The Bible is a "library" of books; it contains "the Word of God in the words of man". Each book has passed through a "pre-written" stage, was written down, subsequently included in the "canon" of Scripture, and accepted as "inspired".

* This "library" includes different types of writing (literary forms), which include poetry (epic, lyric, prayer), history (court, romantic, chronicles), fiction and parable (Jonah, Esther, etc), and wisdom teaching (comparable to the secular wisdom of the time). Their truth is the truth that is relevant to our salvation.

* These books grew over a period of a thousand years. They differ in audience and purpose; they emerge from the life of believing communities. They reflect a developing pedagogy which culminates in Christ.

* This Bible is to be read in a community, in the light of 2000 years of tradition of Christian living, and with the help of the teaching authority of the Church which is itself subject to the Word of God. (cf Mt 13:52)

* Catholics are to be given a solid biblical formation so that it becomes the source of Christian life.

4. Two Texts

a. Genesis I: the First Account of Creation

The fundamentalist takes this as literally true, written by Moses, and contradicting science. In contrast, Catholic scholars understand it as written by Israelite priests 600 years before Christ to reassure their audience, familiar with the creation myths of the Babylonians of:

- * the goodness of the One God and that the world did not come about by chance.
- * the dignity of humanity: the world was prepared for its coming as if by a wise and good king; humanity was the crown of creation and given responsibility for it.
- * evil had its origins in human freedom and choice.

b. Daniel 7: an Example of "Apocalyptic".

Again, the fundamentalist would take this literally and look for its fulfillment, even in our days. It was written in the time it claimed to be. The Catholic scholar recognizes the "literary form" of apocalyptic, a crisis literature intended to reassure its readers that God is still in control, that evil can be dealt with in his plan. Its author, who wrote for his own times, claimed the authority of a hero long dead. His history is accurate as far as his own generation; however, such writing uses strange imagery and predictions.

In our passage, we read of the past in terms of strange beasts: the lion with eagle's wings is a code for the Babylonian empire, the bear for the kingdom of Medes, the leopard for the Persian empire, and the beast with ten horns which are the Seleucid kings including Antiochus

Epiphanes, the persecutor of the readers. The author comforts them with another vision "...coming on the clouds of heaven one like a son of man...". By this figure, he meant faithful Israelites of his own day, and in the gospels, Jesus used the title of himself.

5. Preparation for "What is the Bible?"

Read over and copy the table of contents, both Old and New Testaments.

Session II

What is the Bible?

The Bible is a collection of books which took shape over a period of 1000 years, has been preserved by communities of believers, possesses special divine authority as a record of God's self-revelation, and is used as a guide for living. The Bible is divided into two parts: The Old Testament and the New Testament.

1. The Old Testament

a. These "**Hebrew Scriptures**" are the testament of a people who recognized that God had intervened in their history by delivering them from Egyptian oppression, forming them into a people, and entering into a covenantal relationship with them. Traditionally the Old Testament is divided into:

- * The Law (torah) = the Pentateuch (Genesis - Deuteronomy)
- * The Prophets (nebiim) which includes Joshua - Kings
- * The Writings (ketubim) which includes the Psalms and Wisdom writings

(Other books, accepted by Jews outside Palestine, are recognized by Catholics and known as Deutero-canonical books).

b. We value the Old Testament because:

1) It reveals to us the plan of God (the history of salvation), unfolding through the ages, by means of the great figures in Israelite history like Abraham, Moses, and David. (Read Hebrews 11).

2) It introduces us to the mystery of the person of God. "Such a reading will reveal to us the true face of God, not the God of abstract philosophy who remains unmoved by the events of the world, but the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, whose face in Christ and through the coming of the Reign of God is turned in loving compassion and concern for all who suffer in every age and are struggling to find meaning in their lives" (Final Statement of the Catholic Biblical Federation, Bogota, Colombia, 1990, 7.1).

3) It reveals to us not only the commandments of the Decalogue but also the wisdom of Israel about what really matters in life.

4) It provides us with a treasury of prayers, especially in the Psalms, the hymn book of the Jerusalem temple.

c. Yet it is not a fully Christian book:

It is often provisional and imperfect in its doctrine and morality: e.g in its failure to believe in a future life, in its glorification of violence, its acceptance of polygamy and divorce. It grows in its understanding of God and of human destiny. For the Christian, it finds its completion in Christ whose coming it looked forward to. "The New Testament is hidden in the Old, and the Old Testament is made manifest in the New" (St Augustine).

2. The New Testament

The New Testament is a collection of books which witness to the incarnation of the "Word was made flesh" (Jn 1:14), to the events of his death and resurrection (cf. 1 Co 15:1-7), to the demands of Christian living as "...faith that makes its power felt through love" (Ga 5:6), until "...Christ is formed in you." (Ga 4:19). They emerge from the life and faith of communities whose only Bible was the Old Testament. They can be considered chronologically in the time sequence of their original composition.

a. 50-60 A.D.

The earliest testimony to the Christian experience is offered by the undisputed letters of Paul (1 Th, Ga, 1 and 2 Co, Phm, Ph, and Rm). Paul, the converted Rabbi from Greek Judaism, struggles to apply his understanding of the salvific work of Christ to the day to day lives of his converts (Read 1 Th 1:1-10).

b. 60-85 A.D.

The Synoptic Gospels take shape. **Mark's** (65 A.D.) is a booklet of catechesis for the suffering Christians in Rome. There is no Christianity without the cross. To gain one's life, one may well have to lose it, as Jesus himself did. (Read Mk 8:34-38)

Matthew (85 A.D.) revises Mark for the sake of a different community. Of Jewish background they were no longer accepted by their former co-religionists. Many Gentiles were streaming into their church. Matthew helps them to see how Jesus really was the Messiah expected in the Old Testament and portrays him as the Risen Lord even now challenging them to observe his teaching that reinterpreted the law of Moses. His is the book for the Christian catechist. (Read Mt 28:1-20)

Luke (85 A.D.) wrote his gospel and Acts of the Apostles for the whole world. Christianity was not something done "...in a corner" (Ac 26:26). It was God's gift offered for all. To help his readers live up to its demands, Luke portrayed Jesus as himself the "first Christian". They were to follow his example of prayer, perseverance, and social concern. (Read Lk 10:25-11:4: do what the Samaritan did, listen like Mary, pray like Jesus).

c. 90-100 A.D.

John's Gospel is known as the "Spiritual Gospel". All know the importance of life, of light and dark, and of food and

drink. Those in the Mid-East are familiar with shepherds and vines. They know what really matters in life. Christ is all these things. Jews loved their festivals, Abraham, and Moses: they too found their reality in Christ. Threatened by an insistence on emperor worship by the authorities, the community responded with the production of another "Book of Daniel", the "Apocalypse", to meet the crisis of that time, not the hypothetical crises of our own.

"And indeed everything that was written long ago in the Scriptures was meant to teach us something about hope from the examples of Scripture gives of how people who did not give up were helped by God." (Rm 15:4).

3. Readings for "The Place of the Bible in the Catholic Church"

What does Lk 24:13-35 have to do with our liturgy?

What does Ga 5:13-26 tell us about Christian behavior?

Session III

The Bible in the Catholic Church

Six statements from chapter 6 of Dei Verbum, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation of Vatican II (1962-1965):

1. *"The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord,... she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life especially in the sacred liturgy..." (DV 21).*

This analogy between the Eucharist and the Word begins and ends this chapter. In the Reformation controversies of 16th century, this was forgotten by both sides; happily it is now being recalled by both.

* Lk 24:13-35: Two disciples on the road to Emmaus after the death of Jesus. He walks with them unrecognized. Their fright and despair are banished by his presence. They recognize him in the breaking of bread (the Eucharist) after he has caused their hearts to burn within them through his explanation of the Scripture, and they rush to proclaim him to others.

* Jn 6: Seeing a hungry crowd, Jesus asked, "Where can we buy some bread for these people to eat?" His disciples want to spend money on earthly food; they have yet to learn that he is the bread of life. He is the bread that has come down from heaven (v 33). To eat his body and drink his blood is to have eternal life (v 54). He has the words of eternal life (v 68). He is both word and sacrament.

2. *"...In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets his children with great love and speaks with them..." (DV 21).*

Scriptures are not so much books as a personal communication of "Something which has existed since the beginning...the Word who is life..." (1 Jn 1:1) to "lead us from hearing to faith, from faith to hope, and from hope to love" (St. Augustine "On catechising the uninstructed").

* The same Word of God created the world (cf Gn 1:26, Ps 33:6), came to the prophets (Ezk 6:1) It is a word of power (Is 55:10-11), a word that is like a two-edged sword alive and active (cf. Heb 4:11-12), "...that has power to build you up and to give you your inheritance among all the sanctified." (Ac 20:32). This Word became flesh in Christ (cf. Jn 1:14).

3. *"...the Church is concerned to move ahead daily toward a deeper understanding of the sacred Scriptures so that she may feed her children with the divine words..." (DV 23).*

Some parts of the Bible are easily intelligible and reflect experience familiar to the reader, but sometimes the gap of 2000 years proves too much for immediate comprehension. We ask questions that the author would not recognize. The Church has no fear of scholarly investigation. Such study has her full blessing. At her own Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, students study biblical languages, culture, texts, history, archaeology, geography, and literary criticism. Such scholarly research is a fully ecumenical venture.

* Lk 8:11-15 warns us of some of the dangers for those "hearing the Word". There may be a yielding to temptation, no depth of root to withstand trials, and absorption in worldly affairs and personal pleasures.

The Word must be listened to and made one's own. We believe that God assisted those who wrote the Word; we can also expect him to enable us to understand it if we do our part.

4. *"...all the clergy must hold fast to the sacred Scriptures through diligent sacred reading and careful study,... who are legitimately active in the ministry of the Word. ...lest any of them become 'an empty preacher of the Word of God outwardly, who is not a listener to it inwardly' (St. Augustine)..." (DV 25).*

This is an appeal to all to read Scriptures. The Bible is not just to be possessed but to be used. "Our duty... is to make the Word of God alive in the hearts of all our brothers and sisters in the world." (Final Statement, 7.5.1). Many have started to read the Bible and then have given up. One remedy for this is to follow the official lectionary of the Church. A problem is the non-availability of competent literature, while other literature is available which can be seriously misleading because of fundamentalistic leanings. Support the efforts being made.

* Ac 8:26-40 Philip asked the Ethiopian: "...Do you understand what you are reading?' 'How can I', he replied 'unless I have someone one to guide me?..."

5. *"...This sacred Synod earnestly and specifically urges all the Christian faithful, too, especially religious, to learn by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures the 'excelling knowledge of Jesus Christ' (Ph 3:8). 'For ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ' (St. Jerome)." (DV 25).*

Another reminder is that ultimately we are not concerned with a book but with a person who is Christ. The whole passage of Philippians is worth reading (3:5-15). We read in order to confess that "...Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing this you may have life through his name." (Jn 20:31).

6. "... prayer should accompany the reading of sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together; for 'we speak to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read the divine sayings' (St Ambrose)." (DV25).

Next session: *Prepare for "Praying the Bible"*

Read:

Mk 10:46-52 - Bartimaeus

Lk 11:1-4 - Jesus teaches his disciples to pray.

Session IV

Praying the Bible

1. **The Bible** is a treasury of prayers, from the prayer of Abraham in Genesis (18:22-33) to the prayer of the Church in Revelation (5:9-14).

2. The reading of the Bible has traditionally been combined with prayer in **Lectio Divina**: this includes:

a. Reading:

We read the text repeatedly.

b. Meditation:

We reflect on the lasting values of the text.

c. Prayer:

"Lord, make me understand the lasting values of this text which I do not have".

d. Contemplation:

We adore, praise, and keep silence before the ultimate object of our prayer.

e. Consolation:

We experience the joy of praying and taste the Word of God

f. Discernment:

We grow sensitive to what is in line with the Gospel and what is not.

g. Deliberation:

We seek what is God's will.

h. Action:

We live out the mature fruit and result of the process.

3. Scripture **groups**, for prayer or study, - or both, have formed themselves in many parts of the world. There are many methods. One that has proved itself is the "Seven Step Method" from the Lumko Institute in South Africa.

a. We invite the Lord.

b. We read the text.

c. We look at the text again. No preaching or discussing! What important words and verses do we find? We read the text again.

d. We let God speak to us. Silence 2-5 minutes

e. We share what we have heard in our hearts. No preaching or discussing

f. We search together. What does the Lord want us to do? Which word will we take home?

g. We pray together.

(Lumko provides excellent kits and pictures to assist groups.)

4. The **teaching of the Gospels**. These give us no treatise about prayer. We are to look out ourselves for their teaching on the topic. We examine two texts.

a. **Mark 10:46-52: The Prayer of Bartimaeus.**

We read the story in its context. Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem accompanied by his disciples. They consistently misunderstand his teaching, and they are blind and deaf to what he wants to tell them.

* Bartimaeus knew his blindness.

* Though his understanding of Jesus was inadequate he asked for the right thing.

* He ignored the discouragement of those who told him not to waste his own time or that of Jesus through prayer.

* Through the same crowd he heard words of encouragement: "...Courage... get up; he is calling you..."

* To go to Jesus, he cast aside his cloak, his most valuable possession (cf. Ex 22:26-27)

* But still he had to repeat his request: Jesus asks him a question he had asked no one else in Mark, "...What do you want me to do for you ?..."

* Jesus told him to go; instead, he followed Jesus on the way, the way that led to Jerusalem and the passion. Compare the fearful, reluctant following of the twelve (10:32).

b. **Luke 11:1-4 The "Our Father" in Luke**

Jesus teaches his disciples a model prayer:

* **Father:** We are to address God as Jesus himself addressed him (Lk 10:21; 23:46).

* **May your name be held holy:** like Mary and so many others conscious of what God has given them, we begin with praise (Lk 1:46; 24:53).

* **May your kingdom come:** we remember the persevering prayer of the widow looking for justice and God's elect crying for vindication (Lk 18:1-8).

* **Give us each day the bread we need:** God is not like a friend in bed; but is a loving Father who gives bread and the Holy Spirit for our daily carrying of the cross (Lk 9:23; 11:5-13).

* **And forgive us our sins:** we make the prayer of the publican in the temple (Lk 18:9-18).

* **For we ourselves forgive all indebted to us:** as Jesus forgave those who nailed him to the cross (Lk 23:34).

* **And do not bring us to the test:** we pray that we do not apostasize or run away from our calling. With the disciples, we watch Jesus before his passion, praying not to enter into temptation (Lk 22:39-46).

Session V

The Bible and the Liturgy

1. Three sentences from Vatican II Constitution on Liturgy:

"It is the goal of the most sacred Council to intensify the daily growth of Catholics in Christian living..." (SC 1)

"... if the restoration, progress, and adaptation of the sacred liturgy are to be achieved, it is necessary to promote that warm and living love for Scripture to which the venerable tradition of both Eastern and Western rites gives testimony." (SC 24)

"The treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly, so that richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God's Word. In this way a more representative portion of the holy Scriptures will be read to the people over a set cycle of years." (SC 51).

2. The Lectionary of the Roman Missal

This was published in 1969 (Revised 1981). It aimed *"throughout the liturgical year, but above all during the seasons of Easter, Lent, and Advent at giving the faithful an ever-deepening perception of the faith they profess and of the history of salvation" (60).*

It replaced the previous one year cycle of Sunday readings (an "epistle" and a "Gospel") with a three year cycle including three readings and a responsorial psalm. Features include:

Advent: The Gospel is taken from the "Gospel of the Year". This synoptic Gospel dominates the Sundays for the rest of the year. Formerly, Matthew was read most weeks. Now Matthew is read in "Year A", Mark in "Year B", and Luke in "Year C".

* This means that each year, we are to view Christ through the eyes of a particular evangelist and experience him as the community that he wrote for experienced him. Their "foundation document" for Christian living becomes ours too.

* During Advent, we reflect through the Gospel upon the three comings of Christ: at the end of time, in his public ministry, and at his birth. The first readings are "prophecies about the Messiah and the Messianic age, especially from Isaiah". The second readings "from an apostle serve as exhortations and proclamations in keeping with the various themes of Advent." (92)

Lent: The first reading offers a catechesis on the history of salvation: we have a "Genesis" Sunday, an "Abraham" Sunday, and a "New Covenant" Sunday... The same history of salvation is told again in the readings of the Easter Vigil.

* The Gospel of the first two Sundays is always about the temptations and transfiguration of Jesus, in the version of the "Gospel of the Year". The remaining Sundays in Year A

cover traditional texts from John which prepare for Christian initiation: they can replace the readings of other years which teach about the cross and conversion.

After Easter This period is the "John" period, with readings from his Last Supper discourse, and is used to deepen our understanding of the Easter event. The Old Testament reading is replaced by a reading from the Acts of the Apostles; a different selection is read each year. On the second Sunday, we hear one of the three "summary" passages about the Christian community in Jerusalem. The second reading is from 1 Peter, 1 John, or Revelation according to the year. A preacher here has a wide choice of topics for the homily.

The "Sundays of the Year": These Sundays begin after Christmas, are interrupted by Lent and Easter, and then continue until the 34 Sundays are completed. They offer a continuous reading from the "Gospel of the Year". The Old Testament passage is chosen to throw light on the Gospel reading. The second reading is taken from Paul or James and is described as "semi-continuous". Any link with the Gospel is a coincidence, but the preacher may like to challenge his listeners with Paul.

3. An Example: 26th Sunday of Year B

Jesus is on the road to Jerusalem. His disciples object to a person who is casting out demons in Jesus' name; Jesus corrects them. The Old Testament parallel is from Numbers, the story of Eldad and Medad, who started prophesying without any commission from Moses. The second reading continues the series from James, who this week attacks the rich, or rather their methods of acquiring their wealth.

The preacher can either go into that world and then come back to this one, applying what he has learned to Christian living today, or he can begin with our world and come to a better understanding in the light of the biblical past. If he has spoken about Mark in previous years, he can try preaching James this time, and then it will be three years before the opportunity occurs again.

4. Advantages and Disadvantages of this Reform

This New Lectionary gives us great exposure to a good variety of Scripture over a three year period. It helps us to think biblically and to see Christ as each evangelist saw him. We are on our way to realizing the ambition of Vatican II on the place of Sacred Scripture in Christian living.

The New Lectionary may presume more knowledge of Scripture than each parish community as a whole possesses and many Catholics may be ignorant of the principles on which the selection is based, e.g the use of the responsorial psalm.

* It does not allow the Old Testament to speak sufficiently and loudly on its own account.

* It is not sufficiently adaptable to local needs, circumstances, and celebrations.

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